

URBAN LAND MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

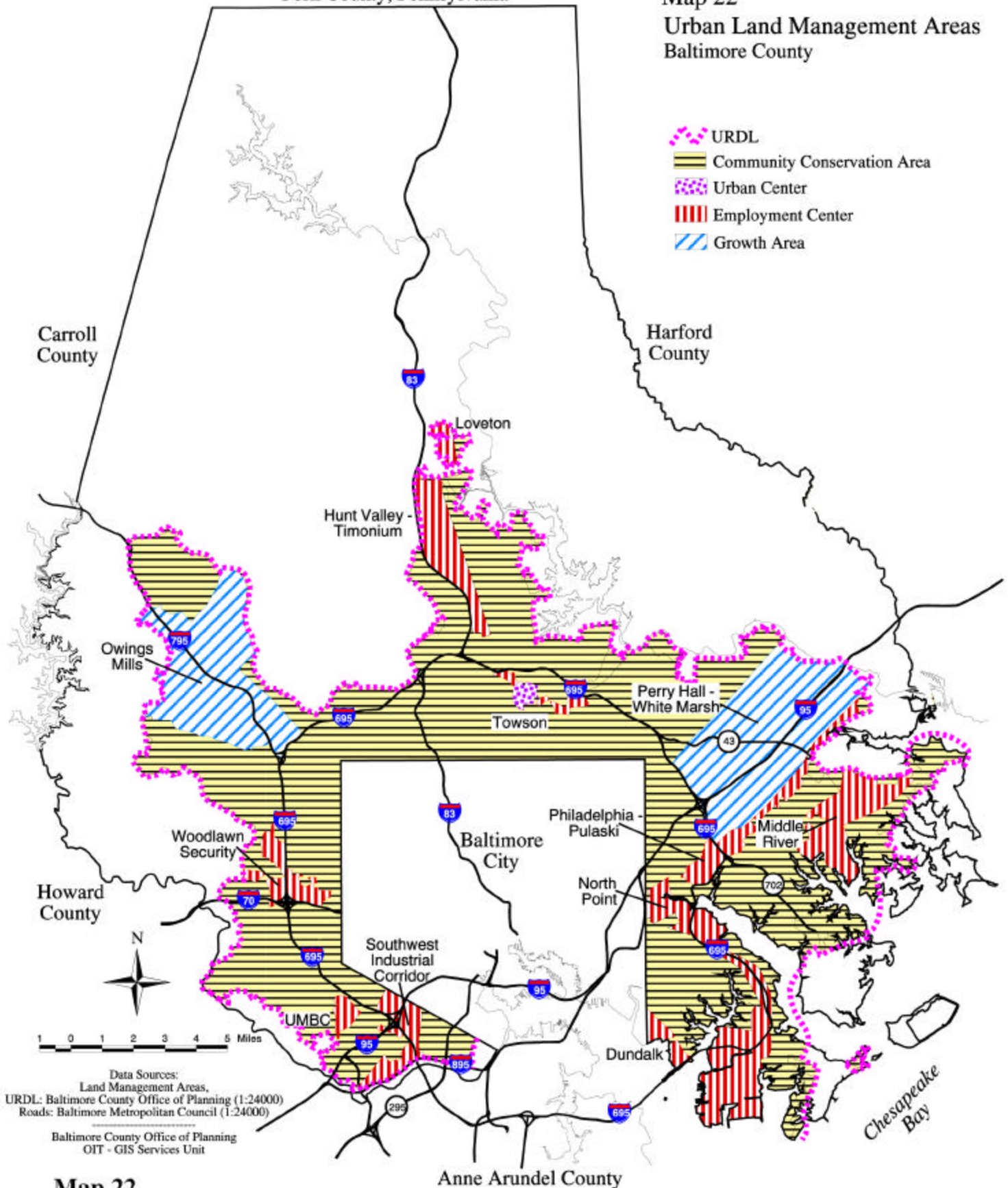
This section of the master plan focuses on specific land management areas and land use issues within the county's urban areas. Community Conservation Areas comprise the largest portion of the land management areas, consisting of the older residential communities and commercial areas of the county within the URDL. Other urban land management areas include employment centers, the two growth areas (Perry Hall-White Marsh and Owings Mills), and the Towson Urban Center (Map 22). All of the land management areas addressed in this section are subject to the provisions of Title 9, Article IV of the Baltimore County Code.



The county's urban land management areas include community conservation areas, an urban center, growth areas, and employment areas.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREAS

Successful communities usually have a combination of well-designed neighborhoods, well-maintained housing, efficient public services and facilities, community-serving businesses, family-supporting employment opportunities, and citizens who are actively engaged in community life. Most of Baltimore County's older communities started with these elements and are maturing gracefully, but change and age can weaken the fabric of





communities, making them vulnerable. The purpose of the community conservation strategy is to ensure that the older communities retain their vitality, especially by initiating prompt remedial actions in those neighborhoods that are showing signs of stress.

POLICIES

- Target public capital resources to community conservation areas for the maintenance and upgrading of neighborhood streets, alleys, parks, schools, and other facilities.
- Facilitate the consolidation and redevelopment of abandoned and underused properties for uses that enhance community conservation areas.

RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREAS

INTRODUCTION

Residential community conservation areas comprise the largest land use within the URDL. Almost 75% of Baltimore County's population lives in community conservation areas. The population growth in these areas over the past several decades produced a proliferation of housing, beginning in the 1940s around the city line and expanding outward. Many desirable neighborhoods, developed close to shopping and work, retain their appeal and value today. However, in a few places, property values have not been sustained. The county needs to continue working to understand the social forces and physical attributes that make some residential neighborhoods flourish for generation after generation, and the processes needed to reinvigorate communities that are beginning to show signs of decline.



Most of the county's older neighborhoods have retained their appeal and value.

Housing that is well-designed and well-built tends to hold its value over time, enhancing perceptions of the community. However, as housing ages, systems need to be upgraded or replaced, and the housing must be modernized to appeal to contemporary homebuyers. Resources have to be invested in old houses in order for them to compete effectively with new housing in the home buying market.

Neighborhoods will frequently undergo several cycles of reinvestment. In a healthy reinvestment cycle, housing is maintained and reused by successive generations. As a neighborhood matures, new families replace the older residents. The new residents renovate and upgrade the housing, leading to continued neighborhood stability. When housing is not maintained, an unhealthy cycle starts as families bypass older communities to look for housing in newer suburban developments and in rural areas. When this happens, subsequent reinvestment in the older communities does not occur. Over time, the rate of home ownership tends to decrease, properties continue to decline, and vacancies increase. Eventually, such communities can become areas of concentrated poverty and blight.



Several interrelated factors can influence the extent to which reinvestment is likely to occur in a community. They include the quality and age of housing construction, the changing demands of the housing market, the proximity of employment and shopping, and the condition of the public infrastructure. Social conditions, particularly the quality of the schools and the perception of public safety, are critical factors affecting the desirability of a community as a place to live. The physical form and appearance of the neighborhood, which includes the street network, the location and use of open space, and features such as alleys, sidewalks and street trees, also affects its desirability.

The county has embarked on an aggressive program to renovate, repair and improve a variety of public facilities and infrastructure systems, including schools, recreation sites, roads, streetscapes, and alleys. These improvements are important components of a comprehensive approach to reinvigorating the county's older residential neighborhoods.

The mix of housing types and how adjoining land uses are interrelated may also affect a neighborhood's sustainability. Attitudes on how to design residential areas are changing. The pervasive suburban development pattern of sprawling, low density tract housing, which has accommodated population growth all across America since the 1950s, has promoted dependence on the automobile and fostered a sense of detachment and isolation. A return to traditional residential land use patterns with smaller lot sizes, convenient public open spaces, proximity to shopping, and pedestrian accessibility, is currently thought to provide a better physical framework for promoting healthy, cohesive neighborhoods with a strong community identity.

Traditional land use patterns with greater emphasis on pedestrian accessibility and proximity to shopping and open spaces can create more cohesive neighborhoods.



The type of housing provided within the neighborhood should vary according to the needs of the population. Housing should be organized in a land use pattern that takes best advantage of the existing transportation network, and promotes pedestrian accessibility. Models for providing an appropriate mix of housing types that will promote sustainable communities should be developed as they relate to reinvigorating existing communities, as well as for new residential construction, to ensure their sustainability in the future.

While the county's residential community conservation areas have been essentially built-out, there are frequently opportunities for infill development or redevelopment of older, declining properties. Usually, the remaining vacant parcels within a community are small and are dispersed throughout the neighborhood, but occasionally larger vacant parcels may exist and become available for infill development. In some instances, infill development has resulted from resubdividing existing properties whereby the rears of larger lots are accessed by "panhandle" driveways to accommodate new housing sites. Panhandle and other incompatible infill developments disrupt the residential pattern of the neighborhood. The added density can place additional burdens on the existing infrastructure, including roads and schools. The county is preparing a coordinated response to address the issues of housing densities, redevelopment, and infill parcels. Through community conservation and planning efforts, residential density is being evaluated. Infill parcels are being examined for their potential to provide quality open space and/or recreational opportunities.



Incompatible infill disrupts the pattern of the neighborhood.

The Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation was created to lead the county's community conservation effort. Part of the office's function is to coordinate among various agencies that provide critical community services, such as education, recreation, health, and infrastructure development. In 1996, the office published the *Consolidated Plan 1996-2000, Baltimore County, Maryland*, which responded to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirement for a plan describing how resources will be used to address community development. Housing is one of eight "strategic issues" identified in the consolidated plan's five-year strategy. The consolidated plan provides for numerous programs and initiatives endorsed by *Master Plan 2010*.

In addition to the physical aspects of the county's residential communities, the county must also address social trends. Underlying all aspects of the

human environment are individuals' social values and behavior towards others. A decline in community involvement, concern for others in society, or civic pride can be threats to residential communities. Baltimore County is diverse and becoming more so as time goes by. Diversity includes things such as age, religion, race, and household income. Citizens should appreciate and celebrate this diversity as an asset. Measures are needed which will promote community stewardship, civic pride, and an appreciation for diversity, encouraging all members of the community to take responsibility for its future.



POLICIES

- Enhance and market the positive attributes of the older neighborhoods.
- Nurture community stability by actively promoting home ownership.
- Encourage property owners to update existing homes to increase their future marketability.
- Encourage attractive and well-maintained rental housing.
- Ensure that the permitted use and density of “infill” parcels enhances established communities.
- Preserve or create open space parcels in established communities, particularly those with higher densities.
- Ensure that community services address community needs and are accessible to residents.
- Encourage the development of housing for the elderly close to town and community centers.
- Encourage the accommodation of citizens with disabilities in new housing design.
- Foster civic pride, appreciation for diversity, and community involvement.

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

Sustaining the county's residential neighborhoods will require a comprehensive, multi-agency approach that considers all factors contributing to their stability. Key elements of neighborhood stability are well-maintained housing and attractive neighborhoods, serving the needs of the county's residents at all income levels and stages of life. Improving the appearance of residential areas will promote a sense of community ownership and pride. The county must work in partnership with local residents and community associations to create customized neighborhood conservation plans, which foster community stewardship.



Instilling a sense of community ownership and pride is a key element of neighborhood stability.



Issue: Density and Development

Basic to the development of residential neighborhoods is the concept of density. Through community planning efforts, the quality and mix of housing types should be analyzed to ensure that the housing stock, density, and the residential pattern will continue to support neighborhood viability. The presence of potential infill and redevelopment sites should be examined. In some instances, vacant parcels can provide visual open space, which is critical to the visual quality of the neighborhood and should be maintained. In other instances, infill development that is compatible with the character of the neighborhood may be appropriate. And, in still other instances, new development that will promote redevelopment or revitalization of the surrounding housing may be appropriate.

In the past, construction in established communities has not always been compatible with the existing housing. The county established its present zoning classifications in the 1950s. In many instances, the zoning designation, which was established for existing residential areas, reflects a density that is higher than the density at which these neighborhoods were originally built. When new housing is developed on vacant parcels within the neighborhood, it is usually at the higher density. Some infill developments create panhandle lots to construct additional housing within the interior of existing blocks. Besides the visual disruption of the residential pattern, the additional density can result in the overloading of the surrounding roads, on-street parking, schools, parks, and community services.

Where possible, infill and redevelopment sites should be used to provide needed open space and recreation opportunities.

Where possible, infill and redevelopment sites should be used to provide needed open space and recreation opportunities. Redevelopment of deteriorating, higher density apartments and townhouses in older neighborhoods to create lower density single family housing will attract homebuyers, stimulating the housing market in the community. Redevelopment can also be used to create better distribution of socio-economic groups to reduce or prevent concentrations of poverty. Where a need for new residential construction is identified, it should be compatible with the existing density of the neighborhood.

Actions

1. For each community plan, evaluate the type and condition of the existing housing.
2. Perform a detailed demographic analysis including projections to determine housing needs.



3. Develop a community consensus on the density and housing mix that would be appropriate to ensure community stability.
4. Identify land parcels that will accommodate the desired housing mix, and opportunities for public spaces like playgrounds or parks. This may involve utilization of vacant parcels, or redevelopment of built parcels.
5. Determine the appropriate future land use for vacant parcels, including parcels that could become available for infill development in the future. Any infill development that creates panhandle lots should be discouraged.
6. Evaluate the development potential and density of vacant parcels zoned DR-5.5, DR-10.5, DR-16, RAE, and OT to determine appropriate land use.
7. Revise zoning as appropriate, either through the four-year Comprehensive Zoning Map Process, or through a rezoning process completed as part of a community plan. Residential zoning of land should be comparable to the existing (“built-out”) density in the surrounding area or neighborhood.
8. To assist in the redevelopment of seriously deteriorated housing, consider the creation of mechanisms to acquire, consolidate and strategically redevelop parcels to promote neighborhood revitalization.
9. Create a public/private mechanism for purchasing and maintaining infill parcels as open space, where appropriate.
10. Investigate mechanisms such as overlay districts, performance standards, or lower density residential zones, which would ensure that neighborhoods remain at appropriate densities.
11. Investigate the feasibility of creating non-governmental land trusts for the acquisition and care of small parcels for the creation of open spaces.

Issue: Ensuring Sustainable Neighborhoods

Addressing the quality of residential neighborhoods will necessitate examining each locality in detail as part of a community plan. Applicable principles, which can be implemented to foster community cohesion for each community, should include:

- providing attractive, well-maintained housing, streets and landscaping;
- providing public spaces including playgrounds, parks and community centers;
- providing interconnected road networks that diffuse traffic through neighborhoods, rather than concentrating it on internal collector streets, and avoiding cul-de-sacs and panhandles; and

The county will evaluate the development potential and density of vacant parcels zoned to determine appropriate land use.



- ensuring pedestrian accessibility within the neighborhood and to shopping, transit stops, recreation, and schools.

New development in existing neighborhoods is frequently not compatible in scale or design. Inappropriately located, dissimilar housing designs can lead to disunity in the visual fabric, and break down the cohesiveness of the community. Conversely, in a neighborhood that is experiencing a decline in the maintenance of its housing stock, appropriately located, compatible housing designs that are physically more attractive can improve the perception of the community, and provide an impetus for renovating the existing housing.

Actions

1. Ensure safe pedestrian accessibility to shopping, recreation, and schools.
2. Continue the county's program for pavement resurfacing of roads and alleys.
3. Provide adequate lighting levels for streets, parking areas, and public walkways.
4. Ensure appropriate screening and buffering for parking areas, trash areas, and other unattractive storage or service uses.
5. Encourage periodic neighborhood cleanup campaigns to remove accumulated trash and debris from public areas, and allow residents to easily dispose of unwanted personal belongings.
6. Improve the attractiveness of the community and promote community identity by providing street trees, community planting areas, and neighborhood identification signs.

The county should facilitate the provision of independent living for its growing senior population.

Issue: Providing Housing for the Growing Senior Population and for the Disabled

As the county's population ages, the proportion of residents who are disabled or frail will increase. Older citizens and people with disabilities need good choices with respect to where and how they live. Some people with disabilities need special services that can be provided in their own homes or in group homes called assisted living facilities.

A majority of frail seniors and people with disabilities prefer to live independently, when it is feasible. The county should consider actions that help to facilitate independent living. Home sharing is a housing option that helps connect single homeowners with compatible individuals who want to share a home and

expenses. It can provide companionship, financial support, and help with chores, making it easier for some seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their homes.



Existing homes often need modifications to provide for independent living. The extent and cost of these modifications could be reduced if new dwellings were designed with disabled people in mind. “Adaptability” refers to the condition of a dwelling that would allow it to be easily modified as a residence for a person with disabilities.

“Visitability” refers to the condition of a private dwelling which enables a disabled person to enter, move about on the first floor, and use the restroom. Private homes as well as public facilities should be easy to visit so that a person with a disability can pursue an active social and community life rather than being confined at home.

Adaptability and visitability are flexible concepts. An adaptable or visitable dwelling can include features as simple and inexpensive as lowering light switches so that someone can easily reach them from a wheelchair.

Action

Assess the needs, benefits, and costs of adaptable and visitable housing.

Issue: Promoting Home Ownership

A mix of homeowner and rental housing is desirable because it provides options for people with different resources and needs. Nevertheless, home ownership helps stabilize communities because owner-residents have a special stake in the community’s future. Baltimore County is fortunate to have a home ownership rate higher than the national average, and the county is taking steps to help maintain and increase home ownership in the community conservation areas. The county has instituted two programs to provide assistance with settlement and closing costs to income-qualified first time homebuyers. This assistance is coupled with homeownership education and counseling services. The Settlement Expense Loan Program (SELP) serves homebuyers throughout the community conservation areas whose incomes are low to moderate (less than 80% of median). The Incentive Purchase Program (IPP), which received the Housing and Urban Development Best Practices award in 1998, serves middle income homebuyers (up to 110% of median) who purchase a home in one of three targeted communities. In addition, state and federal programs exist to provide

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homebuyers with mortgage guarantees and favorable mortgage terms. These programs are largely aimed at helping first time homebuyers, those buyers who generally face the greatest barriers to homeownership. But newer housing in neighboring counties continues to attract Baltimore County's move-up middle income homebuyers. The county should determine ways to effectively promote its many attractive neighborhoods to all segments of the residential real estate market.

Actions

1. Determine whether there is an unmet need for programs like the IPP in additional communities. Consider developing new sources of settlement loan funds that are less restrictive than SELP, if needed.
2. Where appropriate, address housing and marketing strategies in community plans.
3. Work to develop a countywide, neighborhood promotion and marketing plan.
4. Continue to support and promote quality homeownership counseling and educational programs for first time homebuyers throughout the county.

Issue: Maintaining the Existing Housing Stock

The value of older housing diminishes when it is not well maintained. Moreover, poor property maintenance projects a negative community image. This image can demoralize existing residents, discourage community involvement, and dampen home sales.

Poor property maintenance projects a negative community image.

Recognizing the importance of this problem, Baltimore County has expanded and consolidated its code enforcement capabilities. Inspectors who previously enforced different property codes working out of different county agencies have been cross trained and are now located in a single agency. In addition, the county has established the Community Code Enforcement Program. Through this partnership, community associations can conduct their own exterior property inspections in cooperation with county code enforcement staff and issue notices to property owners requesting voluntary compliance. If conditions are not abated, county staff can follow up with an official inspection. Although code enforcement is handled mostly on a complaint basis, the county has conducted occasional comprehensive "sweeps" through designated areas. Sweeps can be used to target specific problems, such as junked cars, or to target areas with generally inadequate property maintenance.

Actions

1. Regularly and thoroughly enforce all property maintenance codes.
2. Encourage community associations to participate in the Community Code Enforcement Program.
3. Develop cost-effective methods for demolishing vacant buildings that are nuisances.
4. Educate property owners and renters about their responsibilities for compliance with property maintenance codes.



Issue: Updating the Existing Housing Stock

To hold its value, housing must not only be well maintained, but also periodically updated. Housing built prior to 1970 often does not contain features considered standard today such as central air conditioning, multiple baths, large closets, modern kitchens, and large specialty rooms. Approximately 60% of the county's housing stock is pre-1970 vintage. Homeowner housing that does not remain competitive may convert to rental housing or resell at lower prices, potentially inducing deterioration of the housing stock and the surrounding community. Because older housing constitutes such a large portion of the county's housing stock, creative, large-scale initiatives are needed to increase marketability and resale values.

Several programs exist to provide financing for the rehabilitation of single family homes. They include a county loan program, a more restrictive state program for the repair of emergency conditions, and a federal loan guarantee program for the rehabilitation of a home at the time of acquisition. These programs, which are administered through the Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation, serve only low to moderate-income homeowners and homebuyers. County loan rehabilitation programs received two awards from the State Department of Housing and Community Development in 1998.

Actions

1. Encourage the use of existing rehabilitation loan programs for homeowners in designated areas; identify gaps and facilitate the establishment of creative new renovation financing initiatives through local financial institutions.
2. Facilitate creative community-wide repair initiatives, such as volume buying for sidewalk, curb/gutter or driveway repairs, re-roofing, and large tree pruning.



Creative initiatives are needed to increase the marketability and resale values of the county's older housing.



3. Educate homeowners about the financial resources available for, and benefits of, quality home renovations.

Issue: Providing for Attractive and Well-Maintained Rental Housing

While homeownership helps to keep communities stable, a supply of quality rental housing throughout the county provides choices and flexibility for people in a variety of circumstances such as students and young working adults who are not ready to own a home; elderly people who are no longer able to take care of a home; families who cannot afford to own a home; or move-up buyers in transition between homes.

Rental housing comprises nearly one-third of Baltimore County's total housing stock. Over 80% of the rental units are located in the community conservation areas, and include scattered, single family houses as well as garden and mid-rise apartment buildings. The balance of the rental housing is primarily located in the growth areas and the Towson Urban Center, where the zoning allows for high-density elevator apartments.

Most of Baltimore County's rental housing is well maintained and well managed. County agencies have provided training courses for property managers on a number of topics, including livability code compliance and enforcement; Section 8 subsidy program policies, procedures, and responsibilities; tenant selection, including how to perform criminal background and credit checks; how to write and enforce leases; and lead paint testing. Nevertheless, there are a few troubled rental housing complexes that are characterized by combinations of obsolescence, physical deterioration, poor management, concentrated poverty, high rates of crime, and vacancy. The county has pursued the selective demolition of sections of troubled large-scale rental housing complexes having these characteristics in order to preserve surrounding communities, reduce density, and increase the amount of open space. The reduced density, along with targeted efforts to improve the delivery of public safety, health, social, and recreational services, is intended to make these communities more stable and livable.



A supply of quality rental housing throughout the county provides choices.

Actions

1. Continue training programs on best management practices for property managers of multi-family and scattered single family rental housing.
2. Establish a process for the registration of rental property owners to facilitate owner/management education and to enable the county to identify such owners for property code enforcement purposes.

3. Continue to reduce density in selected, troubled, large-scale rental complexes.
4. Evaluate the feasibility of setting up a revolving loan fund for cleanup and repair of substandard rental properties.
5. Identify code enforcement “problem properties” among apartment complexes and individual rental properties and concentrate resources on these properties.
6. Continue to conduct annual fire inspections in all multi-family buildings.
7. Consider establishing an annual or periodic interior and exterior code inspection in all apartment buildings.
8. Develop educational resources to inform tenants of their rights and responsibilities under the provisions of the livability code.



Issue: Reducing the Conversion of Owner-Occupied Homes to Rentals

In general, falling property values invite speculators to convert housing to rental units. Therefore, the best way to prevent large-scale rental conversion in homeowner neighborhoods is to keep the neighborhoods attractive for homeownership through a broad range of conservation efforts that help to maintain property values. Specific neighborhoods that may be at particular risk for conversion to rental status require targeted strategies to minimize rental conversions. Such neighborhoods may include those with a concentration of higher risk home mortgagees who may be more likely to default, particularly in a recessionary period, and those with a high proportion of elderly homeowners.

A house is most likely to be converted to rental status when a quick sale is desired, such as when the homeowner becomes sick or disabled and needs a different living environment; when the owner dies, to settle the estate; when a spouse dies or a couple divorces; or when the lender forecloses on the mortgage. In some of these circumstances, it is common to sell the house at auction. Ordinary homebuyers tend to avoid auctions because the process is intimidating and requires ready cash. Consequently, professional investors usually purchase houses sold at auctions. In addition, some investors seek out and approach potential sellers who may not want to list a house for sale with a real estate agent, or who may have become frustrated by a slow home sale market.

Falling property values invite speculators to convert housing to rental units.

Strategies to address this issue include helping to prevent mortgage foreclosure; encouraging home sellers to list their houses with real estate agents rather than selling to investors; and making the choice to remain in their homes more attractive to seniors and disabled homeowners.



Actions

1. Conduct educational workshops for home sellers, particularly targeting elderly residents through senior centers; emphasize the advantages of listing a house with a real estate broker, rather than selling directly to an investor.
2. Continue to provide pre-purchase home ownership counseling to help ensure that first time home buyers are prepared to undertake the financial responsibility of owning a home.
3. Create and promote counseling and referral services to intervene and help prevent mortgage foreclosure when homeowners are in default.

Issue: Fostering Citizen Involvement and Community Stewardship

Citizen involvement is essential to avoid the loss of civic pride and sense of responsibility that can damage communities. The county must promote the stewardship of each community by its residents to strengthen and reinforce its positive social and physical aspects. Community stewardship encompasses maintaining and improving the physical resources of the neighborhood, its housing, infrastructure, open space and overall design, as well as promoting social cohesiveness and responsibility.

To be effective community “stewards,” citizens need to be well informed about government services and functions, and they need a variety of community organizing and leadership skills. They also need flexibility in their work schedules to attend meetings and hearings. Civic organizations need convenient physical space for meetings and other activities, and they need money and other resources to carry out community development projects.



County-sponsored community conservation conferences serve as forums about strengthening communities.

County government has worked to address these needs. The county has co-sponsored six annual community conservation conferences with the Community Conservation Action Group (CCAG), an informal association of community associations and umbrella organizations from across the county. The conferences serve as forums for communicating technical information, supporting leadership development, and sharing ideas about strengthening communities.

Resources available for promoting community stewardship and community improvement projects are varied. The county government has established an annual competitive grant to community associations for physical improvements. The Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation has provided matching funds. Some of the larger employers in the Baltimore region

have established policies that support and encourage civic involvement, such as flex time, time off, awards recognizing community achievement, and small grants for community improvement projects.



Actions

1. Promote community activities to build and strengthen relationships among neighbors, such as community picnics, market days, senior craft fairs, etc.
2. Sponsor local civic improvement activities, such as Community Conservation Grant projects, Pitch-in-for-Progress projects, Earth Day activities, stream clean-ups, community planting projects, or home improvement projects such as Christmas in April, that allow residents to participate physically in improving their communities, and building a personal stake in its future stability.
3. Encourage community associations to use their newsletters, community meetings, and other activities to promote community stewardship concepts as they pertain to strengthening their particular neighborhood.
4. Provide for flexibility in the design and use of public buildings so that every community has convenient gathering spaces that can be used for meetings, community services, and social activities.
5. Encourage employers to accommodate and support the civic activities of their employees.
6. Continue to hold the annual community conservation conference and to support the CCAG.

COMMERCIAL COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREAS

INTRODUCTION

Baltimore County has two basic forms of commercial development throughout its community conservation areas: Commercial Revitalization Districts, which are the older traditional commercial areas, and commercial corridors, which include strip commercial development and shopping centers. Each form of commercial development presents unique challenges and opportunities.

COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION DISTRICTS

Traditional commercial areas play an important role in Baltimore County's overall vitality and prosperity. The county's twelve traditional commercial areas are located within the Urban Rural Demarcation Line (URDL).



Streetscape improvements were recently made in the Catonsville Commercial Revitalization District.



Established during the late 1800s and early 1900s, they originally functioned as villages and centers of commerce at the terminus of transportation links with the City of Baltimore. During the suburban growth that occurred after World War II, the land around and between the commercial areas filled in with residential development.

For an extended period, the commercial areas generally served the retail needs of the surrounding communities. However, as suburban expansion has continued and the retail industry and consumer shopping habits have changed, the strength of the commercial areas has been challenged. In response, the Baltimore County Council designated the county's twelve traditional commercial areas as Commercial Revitalization Districts (CRDs) (Resolutions 114-97 and 83-98) (Map 23). The CRDs operate within a geographically defined area and are targeted with specific county-sponsored programs to enhance their development potential. A formal business and professional association represents each CRD's commercial interests. These associations are members of the Commercial Revitalization Action Group (CRAG), which serves as an advocate and catalyst for improvements within the CRDs, and works in partnership with local businesses, business associations, and government agencies to improve the districts.

Baltimore County's twelve CRDs are presented below grouped by village center, neighborhood center, community center, and corridor. These groupings include their structure, the type of market served, and the representative business and professional association.

Commercial Revitalization Districts are targeted with specific county-sponsored programs to enhance their development potential.

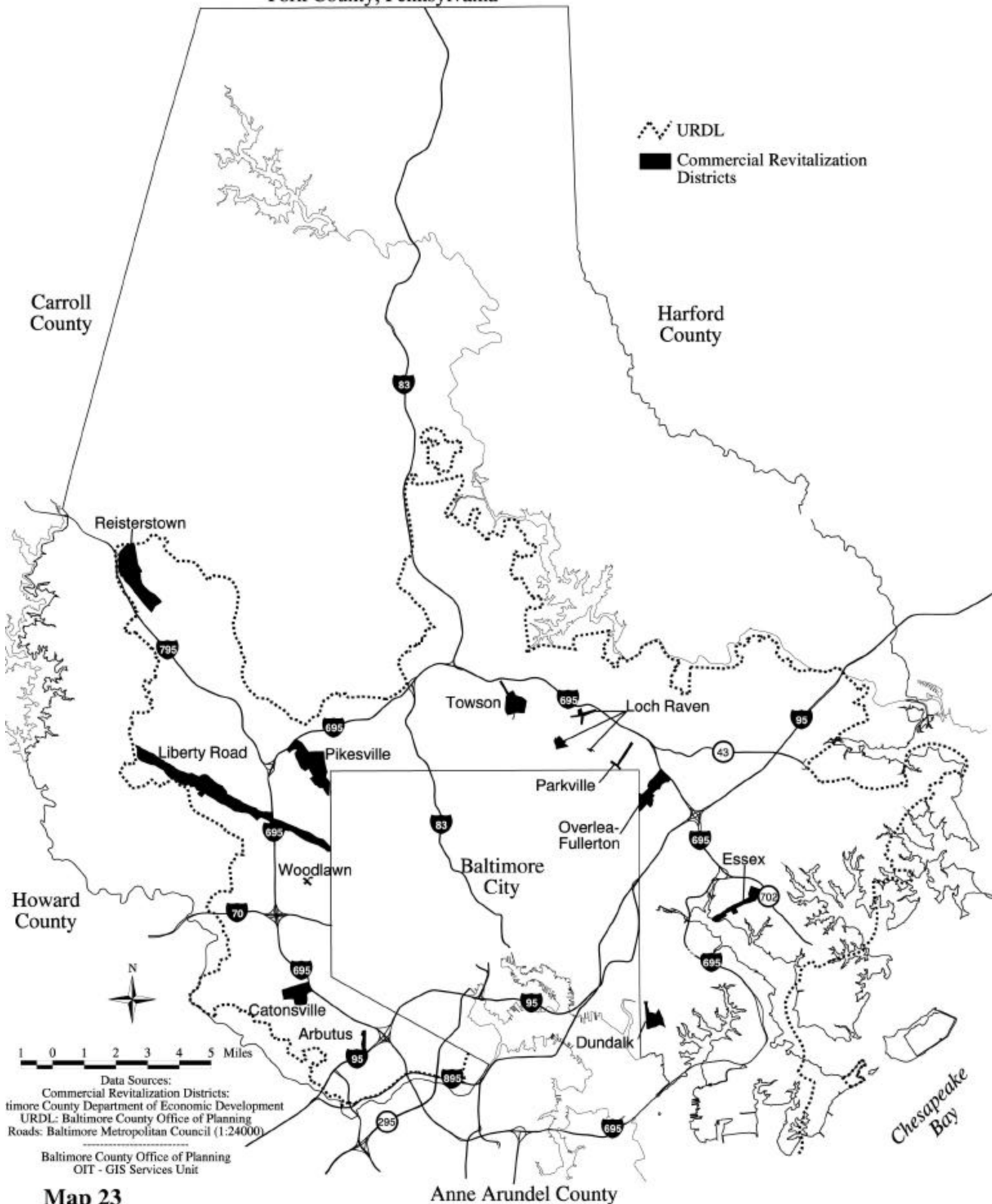
Village Center

- Small in size (10-50 businesses)
- Fairly compact
- Solely retail in function
- Services a small area, one-mile radius
 - Arbutus – Arbutus Business and Professional Association,
 - Woodlawn – Woodlawn Village Business and Professional Association

Neighborhood Center

- Moderate in size (50-150 businesses)
- Identifiable core with strip adjacent
- Several functions, including retail and professional
- Services a larger area, two-mile radius

York County, Pennsylvania





- Dundalk – Eastern Baltimore Area Chamber of Commerce
- Parkville – Parkville Business and Professional Association
- Overlea – Overlea-Fullerton Development Corporation
- Reisterstown – Reisterstown, Owings Mills, Glyndon Chamber of Commerce

Community Center

- Medium in size (150-200 businesses)
- Identified core with auto-oriented strip adjacent
- Multiple functions, retail, professional, office, commercial, and housing
- Services large area, three-mile radius
 - Pikesville – Pikesville Chamber of Commerce
 - Catonsville – Greater Catonsville Chamber of Commerce

Vehicular Oriented Corridor

- Varies in size (100-2,000 businesses)
- No core, elongated, with shopping centers
- Slightly more recent development than others
- Services local communities, commuters, and draws from the region
 - Liberty Road – Liberty Road Business Association
 - Loch Raven – Loch Raven Business Association
 - Essex – Essex Revitalization Community Development Corporation

Regional Commercial Center

- Large in size (more than 300 businesses)
- Identifiable core, pedestrian oriented
- Multiple functions, retail, professional, commercial, office, government, housing
- Services significant portion of region
 - Towson – Towson Business Association



The Dundalk commercial area is an example of a neighborhood center, and is also a distinguished historic structure.

POLICIES

- Assist existing businesses with current and future needs.
- Institute strategies to strengthen the overall well being of the CRDs.
- Promote regulatory mechanisms that improve the CRDs.
- Attract new investment and compatible development.
- Continue existing relationships, resources, and mechanisms to stimulate quality development, and investigate establishing others.

- Enhance the physical capacity of the CRDs through capital improvements, streetscape enhancements, and infrastructure upgrades.



ISSUES AND ACTIONS

While the Commercial Revitalization Districts are primarily occupied by relatively small, independent merchants, collectively they provide a substantial and functional resource. However, the maintenance of this resource is complex, necessitating a coordinated approach involving private and public interests.

Issue: Maintaining the Viability of Revitalization Districts

The county's CRDs have distinctive characteristics that can be promoted and made more attractive to customers, merchants, and developers. The CRDs and the affiliated neighborhoods each possess unique qualities – the types of stores, architectural features, existing infrastructure, convenience, proximity of dense populations, and history can serve as a marketing tool and yield economic advantage over newer, redundant, and underdeveloped locations. The CRDs were originally focused in either a village center configuration, with a pedestrian-oriented, human-scale shopping environment, or a corridor strip form, more associated with automobiles. CRDs should be sought-after places to shop, eat, and relax. Ideally, CRD redevelopment should provide a complementary mix of uses such as office, residential, services, entertainment, and cultural facilities.

Restaurants, cafés, and other eating establishments are important fixtures within the CRDs. These enterprises provide a needed service, help define the CRD in which they are located, attract patrons who often conduct other business in the area, extend the evening hours that the CRD is utilized, have high employment levels, and are often locally owned and operated. Food and beverage oriented establishments require a liquor license to serve alcohol. However, the limited availability of liquor licenses contributes to their excessive cost and inhibits the growth of this economic sector.

The distinctive character of each of the county's commercial revitalization districts should be promoted.

Actions

1. Prioritize CRDs based on market conditions, age of infrastructure, and need. Develop timeframes that enable the county, state, and private entities to allocate resources appropriately.
2. For each CRD, develop or update a plan based on the needs of the area. Program elements to be addressed may include:



- Streetscaping — lighting, landscaping, and street furniture with continuing maintenance.
 - Consolidation and removal of redundant or unnecessary publicly owned signs.
 - Market research to determine the potential for new uses. Encourage the provision of a full range of goods and services, with a concentrated, continuous area to support pedestrian-oriented shopping.
 - Identification of parcels that may be considered for consolidation while encouraging sensitivity to the existing economic, residential, and physical fabric of the CRD and its surrounding community.
 - Strategies for parking management, including locations for shared lots and methods to reduce parking on residential streets by non-residents.
 - Identification of buildings, sites, and areas that should be listed and promoted as historic landmarks or districts. Such identification should preserve historically significant sites but still allow for positive development.
3. Consider reducing the requirement for on-site parking within CRDs only where other options such as reciprocal parking agreements have been exhausted.
- Continue to provide self-supporting county-owned parking facilities.
 - Implement on-street parking management programs in residential neighborhoods to reduce parking by employees and customers, and establish clear guidelines for the use of residentially zoned land for business parking.
 - Develop mechanisms to encourage privately-owned, shared parking.
 - Promote the use of non-prime locations for merchant and employee parking as a method of reducing parking congestion in valued spaces.
 - Indent sidewalks to allow for additional on street parking in areas with exceptionally wide sidewalks.
4. Explore changes to state law to allow for a sufficient number of liquor licenses, for specific purposes and in designated areas within CRDs.



Streetscaping programs which include lighting, landscaping, and street furniture are among the ways to improve the quality of older commercial areas.

Issue: Promoting Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction

The evolving definition of a successful CRD requires coordinated input from all interested parties, public and private. In any given area there are often a large number of property owners who each control small individual lots. The availability of space for the expansion of existing businesses and

the size requirements of a contemporary retail facility (over one acre) often inhibit redevelopment, putting older areas at a competitive disadvantage. To respond to development needs, it is often necessary to consolidate multiple parcels under separate ownership, which is usually time consuming, frequently leads to speculation by property owners, and may not be accomplished due to hold-outs. Additional issues that arise in CRDs include adjusting differing zoning designations and addressing physical elements such as demolition, environmental concerns, and upgrading utilities.



Actions

1. Utilize CRAG as a resource to maximize the effective application of resources that promote business and economic development within the CRDs, to:
 - promote the coordinated development of the CRDs;
 - assist individual CRDs in working with the county through the Commercial District Management Authority (CDMA) to protect and maintain the county's valuable streetscape investments; and
 - promote the county's Commercial Revitalization Program and affiliated technical and financial assistance resources.
2. Use county programs, such as the Commercial Revitalization Program, and legislation, such as zoning regulations, to address current and future issues within the CRDs. Promote the CRDs as attractive places in which to do business by:
 - Creating marketing packages for each CRD highlighting major available properties, amenities, demographics, and available county assistance;
 - Implementing a program to attract appropriate new investment to each CRD; and
 - Promoting the county's Small Business Loan Fund as a source of capital that is sensitive to the needs of small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in CRDs.
3. In cooperation with CRAG and its constituent members, support new development and the expansion of existing businesses by identifying parcels with consolidation potential, and review associated regulatory and impact concerns.
4. Investigate methods to address problem absentee landlords.
5. Encourage the maintenance and improvement of properties through the streetscape program, Commercial Revitalization Incentive Programs (Architect on Call, Business Improvement Loan Program, and the

***The county
will strengthen
its Commercial
Revitalization
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business.***



Commercial Revitalization Tax Credit), and the enforcement of zoning regulations, building code, and other regulatory mechanisms.

6. Develop mechanisms to ensure that development standards are consistently followed, such as through agreements, overlay districts, and special review processes.
7. Explore the use of historic designations, loans, grants, and other special incentives to encourage reinvestment in older neighborhoods.

COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Commercial corridors are long strips of commercial land uses adjoining the county's major arterial highways, extending from Baltimore City to the URDL. The county's commercial corridors serve two vital functions: 1) as highways that carry through traffic; and 2) as access for neighboring residential areas to a wide range of shopping, dining, and other personal service opportunities.

Commercial corridors include low-density strip commercial development, accessible almost exclusively by automobile, and shopping centers, typically anchored by a large grocery store. The commercial corridors are the "faces" of the adjacent communities. The commercial corridors' appearance and liveliness influences perceptions about the adjoining neighborhoods. Well-designed and well-maintained commercial areas bring vitality to communities. Declining commercial areas and vacant storefronts hurt the image of adjacent communities and lower the quality of life for residents. The aesthetic appearance of commercial areas is as critical an issue as their economic viability.

The commercial corridors' appearance and liveliness influence perceptions about the adjoining neighborhoods.

Shopping habits are changing in terms of where and how people shop. Many purchases formerly made at department stores or discount variety stores are now being made at deep discount warehouse stores. Local market analysts agree that the deep-discount market is not built-out in Baltimore County, especially in the central corridor; several more of these types of projects are expected. There will also continue to be development of shopping centers anchored by grocery stores.

Continuing growth in mail order, television, and Internet shopping sales shows that the market remains convenience driven. Consumers want to spend less time getting to and from shopping places. They want to be able to get in and out of a shopping center quickly and park conveniently. Major drug store chains are responding to this demand with freestanding stores and

drive-through services. New development and redevelopment along commercial corridors will be motivated to provide convenient parking and access. The older properties of the established commercial corridors are frequently constrained by their size and shape from providing convenient parking and access.



Baltimore County commercial areas also include large, regional shopping nodes such as malls, and smaller, discrete shopping areas that are frequently located within neighborhoods. Community shopping centers that are not anchored by a grocery store are particularly vulnerable to changes in retailing. These centers find it difficult to compete with the amenities and variety offered by larger regional shopping centers, the low prices of deep-discount warehouses, and the convenience of centers anchored by a supermarket. Successful community shopping centers that reposition their tenant mix to serve the surrounding community, and are redesigned to become a focal point of the community tend to be successful as measured by low vacancy rates, high rents, and high sales. Community shopping centers that do not pursue this strategy are more likely to fail, leading to a cycle of disinvestment, higher vacancy rates and abandonment.

POLICIES

- Reduce potential land use conflicts between commercial corridors and nearby residential areas.
- Implement strategies to address common traffic and parking issues in business areas.
- Promote safe pedestrian access to shopping areas from neighborhoods and between shopping areas.
- Provide or enhance a sense of identity and place by improving the appearance of commercial corridors.

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

To maintain the continued viability of the county's commercial corridors, efforts must continue to direct the most intensive commercial development to major nodes, and to make shopping along commercial corridors more inviting and convenient.

Issue: Improving Land Use Criteria

The use listings of the *Baltimore County Zoning Regulations* are complicated and special hearings are often required to determine whether



Redevelopment of shopping centers that tailor their tenant mix to serve the surrounding community tends to be successful.



a use is permitted. The result is that there is little certainty for both the property owner and the neighborhood as to how property will be developed and used.

Additionally, the zoning regulations permit very large retail and entertainment uses in the BM (business, major), BR (business, roadside), and BL (business, local) zones. These uses can have intensive traffic impacts on major roads, visual impacts on surrounding areas, and economic impacts on local commercial uses.

Actions

1. Provide a statement of intent, and regulations to implement the intent, for each zone:
 - The BM zone should be geared for large, regional retail and entertainment destinations.
 - The BR zone should be revised so that it is only appropriate for strip commercial use and contains appropriate use, area, and buffer requirements.
 - A zone suitable for the special constraints and needs of revitalization districts should be developed.
 - Reduce the Floor Area Ratios (FARs) in the BL, BM, and BR zones to be compatible with adjacent residential areas. High FARs should only be permitted within approved growth areas or the Towson Urban Center.
2. Promote redevelopment of existing large enclosed shopping malls for regional shopping destinations. Consider viable reuse of shopping centers that may no longer be needed due to market changes or consolidation. In both instances, consider mixed use opportunities.
3. Regional retail and entertainment shopping nodes along commercial corridors may be appropriate at locations that are within or adjacent to business zoned property, and at intersections served by major arterials with direct access to an interstate highway. Additional requirements for these regional nodes along commercial corridors should include:
 - a PUD-C for the development of regional retail when the site abuts a BM zone. The retail development should continue to be oriented to the commercial corridor and not provide access to roads which are not commercial corridors;
 - road improvements such as left turn lanes and service roads to minimize traffic impacts;



The county will continue to promote the redevelopment of enclosed shopping malls as regional shopping destinations, such as Towson Town Center.



- utilities to be placed underground where new development occurs; and
 - additional limitations as recommended by a community plan.
4. Prepare comprehensive recommendations regarding zoning reclassifications along each of the commercial corridors prior to the CZMP, or as part of an adopted community plan.
 5. Promote property between shopping areas for uses that will complement and increase the viability of the shopping areas, while conserving the adjacent communities.
 - Modify the zoning to encourage housing for the elderly, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes along commercial corridors.
 - Encourage employment-intensive uses and reclassify undeveloped properties along the commercial corridors to foster development for employment-intensive uses.
 - A number of non-residential uses are permitted by special exception in residential zones. These include funeral homes, veterinarians' offices, bed and breakfasts, tourist homes, music conservatories, and professional offices. These uses are more appropriately located along arterial roadways rather than local streets. Modify the zoning regulations to remove these uses from the residential zones, but permit these uses on parcels between shopping areas along commercial corridors.
 6. Create tools that enable commercial corridors to develop a distinctive character and mix of complementary uses.

Issue: Use of Manufacturing-Zoned Land for Retail Use

Pressure to use ML (manufacturing, light) zoned land for retail uses is increasing as the county's existing commercial corridors become more congested. ML-zoned sites are attractive because they are accessible, provide ample parking opportunities, and are less costly than sites with business zoning. Permitting ML-zoned land to be developed for retail uses means that fewer sites are available for corporate headquarters, manufacturing, and other employment-intensive uses. Allowing land along such roads as Beaver Dam Road, Owings Mills Boulevard, and Red Run Boulevard to be used for retail purposes would inhibit their ability to function as roads designed to carry through traffic. Using ML-zoned land for new retail development can also undermine the viability of existing retail centers and revitalization areas.

Pressure to use manufacturing-zoned land for retail uses is increasing as the county's existing commercial corridors become more congested.



Actions

1. Revise the manufacturing zones to limit auxiliary retail and personal service uses.
2. Delineate corridors for commercial and industrial use in the Baltimore County Functional Classification Map to establish and maintain appropriate zoning and land use.
3. Preserve the existing inventory of land with ML zoning during rezoning processes.

Issue: Traffic and Convenience

As noted earlier, development along commercial corridors exists as narrow bands of commercial zoning adjacent to residentially-zoned land. In many places, the depth of commercial properties along the corridor is inadequate to accommodate appropriate buffers between the commercial and residential areas, and rear loading access and parking are often constrained.

The commercial corridor transportation routes are mostly state highways. While the county regulates land use along the corridors, the state regulates access to the adjoining properties through the approval of curb cuts for driveway entrances. Multiple driveways for single parcels have frequently been approved, resulting in greater traffic congestion. Congestion makes shopping along commercial corridors less convenient and encourages consumers to bypass the corridor to shop elsewhere.

Pedestrian access from adjacent neighborhoods, between shopping areas, and from transit stops is poor. Sidewalks are often discontinuous. The county has been inconsistent in requiring property owners in commercial areas to provide sidewalks. The result is that walking between many shopping areas is unsafe or impossible.



A lack of sidewalks in and leading to commercial areas makes pedestrian access difficult.

The commercial revitalization districts typically have better pedestrian access than the commercial corridors because they were originally designed for pedestrians. Providing convenient vehicle access and parking, while maintaining the ambiance and character of the area, is the major challenge in these areas. The success of such shopping centers as “The Avenue” in White Marsh indicates that there is a market for the traditional pedestrian-oriented shopping areas provided in the county’s commercial revitalization districts.



Actions

1. As part of community plan efforts, create a “driveway curb cut” task force, including the county, state, property owners, community residents, and business owners. Shared access will promote convenient shopping by reducing traffic congestion. More on-site parking will be made available for commercial uses, which will reduce spillover onto residential streets.
 - Identify where new curb cuts should be avoided and where existing curb cuts could be consolidated.
 - Develop incentives to encourage shared use of driveways.
 - Modify zoning regulations that impede the shared use of driveways.
 - Reduce off-street parking requirements for uses that share parking.
 - Create a model agreement for private property owners regarding use of parking spaces, paving, maintenance costs and related issues.
2. Promote the consolidation of small parcels.
 - Sponsor market research to determine the feasibility of the redevelopment and consolidation of small parcels along commercial corridors.
 - Develop a financial model to allow individual parcel owners to consolidate their parcels, while retaining a proportionate share of future profits from a redeveloped, consolidated site.
 - Consider the creation of a private or quasi-public redevelopment mechanism with the power to acquire and redevelop property in accordance with the stated policy.
3. Reduce on-street parking by employees and customers in residential neighborhoods through on-street parking management programs.
4. Encourage transit-oriented design.
5. To promote pedestrian access from neighborhoods and between shopping areas, provide continuous sidewalks along the length of both sides of commercial corridors, as well as crosswalks; medians at signalized intersections for pedestrian safety; and pedestrian controls at traffic signals.

Curb cuts should be consolidated to reduce traffic congestion on commercial corridors.

Issue: Improving Design Quality and Creating Identity

Unplanned commercial corridors can create a sense of being “nowhere.” Their endless jumble of nondescript buildings, parking lots, signs, and overhead utility lines leads to street clutter, lack of identity, an unwelcoming atmosphere for shoppers, and disassociation with community.



Improving visual appearance, establishing identity through design elements, and eliminating clutter will help to ensure the continued viability of the county's commercial corridors. The county has adopted regulations promoting these objectives. However, regulations alone will not lead to dramatic improvement. The majority of commercial development qualifies for limited exemptions to the development regulations. While a project that receives a limited exemption is subject to the same standards as other projects, qualitative standards are difficult to achieve, because the project does not receive the same scrutiny or level of public review. The county's landscaping requirements have been in effect since the 1980s; however, they do not apply to existing development that predates the standards' enactment.

Action

Coordinate and develop programs to improve the appearance of commercial areas and provide a sense of identity and place, including:

- "Streetscaping" – improve lighting, landscaping, and street furniture.
- Explicitly permit decorative street banners to promote identification.
- Consolidate and remove redundant or unnecessary publicly-owned signs.
- Inspect landscaping and ensure that it is maintained.
- Develop public-private partnerships to ensure adequate maintenance and quality appearance of commercial areas.
- Ensure the provision of adequate buffers between commercial and residential areas.